



# County of Los Angeles CHIEF EXECUTIVE OFFICE

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WILLIAM T FUJIOKA  
Chief Executive Officer

February 12, 2010

To: Supervisor Gloria Molina, Chair  
Supervisor Mark Ridley-Thomas  
Supervisor Zev Yaroslavsky  
Supervisor Don Knabe  
Supervisor Michael D. Antonovich

From: William T Fujioka  
Chief Executive Officer

Board of Supervisors  
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MARK RIDLEY-THOMAS  
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## **STATUS REPORT – NATURAL HISTORY MUSEUM'S PLANS TO TRANSFER COUNTY HISTORIC AUTOMOBILE COLLECTION AND ASSESSMENT OF VEHICLES PRIOR TO ANY DISPOSITION**

On November 6, 2007, your Board approved the termination of the County Historic Automobile Collection Agreement with the Petersen Automotive Museum Foundation and ordered the Chief Executive Officer to report back to the Board on the Natural History Museum's (NHM) plans to assess the County-owned historic automotive vehicle collection (County Collection) before any cars are sold, or proposed to be sold. Since that date, NHM has proceeded with moving the County Collection vehicles to the new County-leased space. New loan agreements were signed for the vehicles that remain at the Petersen Automotive Museum (Petersen).

The status at this time is as follows:

- An Executive Summary of the Preliminary Management Plan is attached. The Plan will include strategies for future care and conservation of the vehicles and an evaluation of how to maximize public access and fund raising opportunities through the exhibition of the Collection;

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- In the coming months, Dr. John Long, Vice President for Research and Collections, and his team will address issues such as how much of the Collection should be retained, how much should be de-accessed, and the implications on storage and exhibitions. Upon completion of this section of the Preliminary Management Plan (estimated June 30, 2010), the Plan will be presented to your Board Offices and the Museum's team will continue to implement collection management pursuant to your Board's direction in the form of an approved Management Plan.
- Museum staff is working to complete the tire and tube fitting to all vehicles that lack tires.

The next status report will be provided by May 14, 2010. If you have questions or need further information, please contact me or your staff may contact Lari Sheehan, at (213) 893-2477, or via email at [lsheehan@ceo.lacounty.gov](mailto:lsheehan@ceo.lacounty.gov).

WTF:LS  
DSP:RTM:os

Attachment

c: Executive Office, Board of Supervisors  
County Counsel  
Natural History Museum

## **County Historic Vehicle Collection Report**

**Date: February 10, 2010**

This report provides an executive summary of the Preliminary Management Plan for the County's Historic Vehicle Collection, as compiled by Collections Manager Beth Werling from advice provided by seven external consultants on the collection. Furthermore, a new Automobile Collection Committee has been set up to implement recommendations from the Plan and track actions and progress within the time frame leading up to the end of the Gardena Warehouse lease (end 2012) where the collection is currently housed. The Plan and Committee's work are the next steps in implementing the County Board of Supervisors' direction concerning the Collection. These steps also are intended to provide opportunities to the County's Chief Executive Office and Board of Supervisors to continue to review the Museum's management of the collection, leading up to any Museum report to the Board of Supervisors concerning proposed deaccession of any vehicles in the collection. The Plan includes actions for future care and conservation of the vehicles, and suggests ways to maximize public access and fund-raising opportunities using the most significant elements of the NHM's Automotive Collection. This Committee of staff from the Natural History Museum comprises:

- Dr. John Long, Vice President, Research and Collections (CHAIR)
- Dr. William Estrada, Curator and Chair, History Department
- Dr. Margaret Hardin, Divisional Chief, Cultural Studies Division
- Ms. Beth Werling, Collections Manager, History Department

The Committee will meet every two months and report back to the Museum's Executive Staff on progress of the implementation of actions concerning the Automotive Collection.

### **Executive Summary of the Preliminary Management Plan for the Automotive Collection of the Natural History Museum of LA County.**

The Automotive Collection of the Natural History Museum of LA County ("the Museum") has a long history, starting with our first acquisition of the 1909 Welch Model 4-0 donated in 1929. Currently, the collection includes 75 self-propelled cars, trucks, tractors, and motorcycles, with particular emphasis on the early experimental years of the industry (1900's-1930), but with examples of vehicles up to 1984. It is one of the most significant collections in the world, focusing particularly on the reciprocal development of the automobile and Los Angeles in particular and California in general. It forms an essential part of the much larger Material Culture Collection of the Museum, which in turn is integral to the overall collections of 35-million objects and specimens – the second largest museum collection in the USA (the national collections of the Smithsonian Institution being the largest). The Automotive Collection is just

one aspect of the future challenges facing the Museum concerning costs of maintaining a range of off-site storage facilities to house its collections for future generations and further improve the Museum's ability to provide collections care, access, and use. A long-term overarching storage plan for the entire range of Museum collections that will be developed over the next year will also have major bearing on the longer-term storage and access for the Automotive Collection in the context of the Material Culture and other collections.

The Preliminary Management Plan was developed following the return of many of the cars from the Petersen Automotive Museum in 2008. The cars were immediately assessed and conservation and urgent care provided for those requiring it. The Museum then engaged the services of seven expert consultants in order to assess the historical and cultural significance of its vehicles. The consultants used were:

- Robert Casey, Curator of Transportation, Henry Ford Museum
- Richard Freshman, Fossil Motor Sports
- Leslie Kendall, Curator, Petersen Automotive Museum
- Skip Marketti, Chief Curator, The Nethercutt Collection
- Allan Unrein, Director, Crawford Auto-Aviation Museum
- Roger B. White, Associate Curator, National Museum of American History
- James Zordich, Curator Emeritus, Natural History Museum of LA County

The reports of these expert consultants comprise approximately 400 pages of detailed information that we have synthesized and added to our own expertise to develop the Preliminary Management Plan (approximately 250 pages). The following outline summarizes the course of action for the long-term care and public access of the Automotive Collection, recognizing the urgency for better utilizing and re-housing the most significant components of the collection as the Gardena lease nears its termination, and for finding suitable long-term collection housing, including possibly through a range of external loans to bona fide institutions that might wish to display some of the vehicles.

The Plan summarizes details on the state of preservation, owner and manufacturer's history, trail of ownerships, restorative or conservative work done, and cultural significance of 75 automobiles, trucks and motorcycles currently comprising the Museum's Automotive Collection. Of these, six are currently on loan for display at the Petersen Automotive Museum, two are currently in quarantine and will be returned shortly to the collections, and one is on loan to the Helms Bakery Museum. Currently the Museum is developing an extensive multi-gallery exhibit on the history and environment of Los Angeles and the southern California region, and the Museum has begun conservation of some of the vehicles to use as displays within this exhibit ("Under The Sun," opening in 2012).

The Automobile Collection includes a large number of vehicles having direct cultural significance to the story of the Los Angeles automotive industry, or that of California (categorized in the Plan as Class A). One example is a prototype made locally in Los Angeles and never mass-produced (the 1912 Henry Grey, named after its builder, a Los Angeles architect). Others like the 1909 Durocar were mass-produced and sold in Los Angeles for a short time, or the 1920 Burnett –Brunell an experimental model without any valves. Others like the 1932 Duesenberg were partially made in Pasadena, where Walter M. Murphy designed and built the bodywork for the Duesenbergs, as well as a range of other luxury makes of the period.

Class B cars include a variety which are unique or rare and make a significant contribution to our understanding of the automotive industry as a whole. These include a red 1909 Model T Ford produced in the first week of their production run (1909-1927), which set a benchmark for mass production in the automotive industry. Shortly after, nearly all Model T's produced were painted black. Others include the 1907 Aerocar, ours being the only one in existence.

Class C cars include some that are beautifully restored and in excellent condition, but not necessarily of local significance or having relevance to local history or locally significant people. These include the fully restored 1927 McFarlan, a 1963 Silver Cloud III Rolls Royce, and several others. The Plan notes that unlike most of the Class A and Class B vehicles, many of these that have been extensively restored or rebuilt lack the 'cultural DNA' of the original materials used when the vehicle was first produced and thus of lesser significance for researchers working on historical or automotive projects than unrestored originals.

The on-going categorization mentioned above is based not only on the advice from the seven consultants, but also taking into account the long-term storage considerations of the Museum, and potential requirements for future exhibitions (including galleries, smaller exhibition spaces, and temporary exhibits). Actions to follow will include:

1. Completion of tire and tube fitting to all vehicles lacking tires (by July 2010),
2. Off-site loans of vehicles to other institutions,
3. Off-site storage of vehicles within existing Museum and County facilities,
4. De-accession of parts of the collection not deemed relevant to the core mission of the Museum,
5. Reinvestment of funds raised into conservation and care of the remaining collection in accord with AAM (American Association of Museums) guidelines,
6. Developing marketing and commercial uses (e.g., use in marketing, advertising, etc),
7. Developing increased public interest to attract potential donors to support the on-going development of the Museum Automotive Collection.